



COMMITTEE ON
**EDUCATION
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REPUBLICANS

**COMMITTEE
STATEMENT**

**Opening Statement of Rep. Burgess Owens (R-UT), Republican Leader
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education:
"Back to School: Highlighting the Best Practices for Safely Reopening Schools"
September 29, 2021**

(As prepared for delivery)

"The American Rescue Plan did not deliver on its promise to help schools safely reopen in the fall. If it had, we would not be sitting in this hearing today.

Untargeted funding was never the answer to safe school reopenings, and Democrats sabotaged those efforts even further by voting not to require in-person learning as a condition of COVID-19 relief funding.

Our top priority must be protecting children's access to the classroom for full-time, in-person learning. To accomplish that goal, we must lean on scientific facts and not political fictions. According to the CDC, schools are not a significant source of COVID-19 spread or infections. The current surge we are experiencing in COVID-19 related hospitalizations began in June, long before schools reopened, and data from the Los Angeles Unified School District show that infection rates in that district dropped following mass school reopenings.

We also know that children are at exceptionally low risk of infection and hospitalization from COVID-19. For adults, including teachers and school administration staff, and children over twelve there are several safe, effective, and widely available vaccines that are proven to ward off serious infections and hospitalization.

For those in need of extra protection, masking is also available. While the science behind the benefits of masking for children is questionable, parents know best how to safeguard their children's mental and physical health. As such, the federal

government has no business dictating medical decisions on behalf of individuals and families.

Clearly, the classroom setting does not heighten children and teachers' risk of severe COVID-19 cases. But all children, especially those with disabilities and experiencing domestic abuse or poverty, are at exceptional risk of learning loss and mental health decline from remote learning.

To make matters worse, we do not know the long-term implications of mass school closures, but preliminary data and studies suggest that it is negatively impacting the entire trajectory of students' lives. During the 2020-2021 school year, students fell on average five months behind in math and four months behind in reading. Low-income and minority children were especially impacted by these closures, falling one to two months further behind than their white or wealthy peers.

To put that into perspective, as a result of pandemic-related learning loss, students may earn \$49,000 to \$61,000 less over their lifetime. That could impact the U.S. economy by \$128 billion to \$188 billion annually once this generation enters the workforce.

Every child's life and learning are important, and we should do everything we can to ensure they receive a high-quality education. But it's not just individual futures on the line – our entire society stands to lose if we cannot get our educational system in order.

Democrats are choosing the devil we don't know, the long-term impacts of learning loss, over the devil we do, COVID-19. We have long-term mitigation and prevention strategies in place to prevent serious infections. We do not have long-term strategies in place to reeducate millions of students who fell behind or off schools' radars completely.

More funding is not the answer. More government mandates are not the answer. I urge this Committee to lead by example and fully reopen as a signal to schools across America that it is safe for them to do so, too.

Thank you to all our witnesses for participating in this important discussion today and I yield back the balance of my time."

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